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ABSTRACT

Legislated change in rural schools districts may be slow and painful. This paper describes the ambience of a rural Texas K-12 school through the eyes of a new science teacher with northern and urban education experience and through the observations of an outside researcher. Attitudes that learning is not important, that hard subjects need not be studied, and that extracurricular activities come first in scheduling set the tone. Legislation of academic course requirements and time requirements flies in the face of these predominant attitudes. Numerous classroom interruptions are accepted as the norm during the school day. Supporting these attitudes, the school board resists cooperation with legislative mandates. Citing local control, the board allows sports teams to leave the school frequently during the school day and to schedule games during testing periods, with teachers asked to be aware of the situation. The board elects not to follow the state mandate that students must master 70% of a subject's essential elements. Descriptions of school and board are analyzed from two points of view: the view that state mandates must be implemented versus the inherent view that local beliefs must be respected. The paper raises questions about ethnographic methodology and the effect of the differing observation points of the two researchers (i.e., teacher in the system and research outside the system) on the findings. This paper contains 18 references. (DHP)

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REFORMING RURAL EDUCATION: A LOOK FROM BOTH ENDS OF THE TUNNEL

by

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and

Susan B. Lutz

A paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Washington, D.C., 1987.

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REFORMING RURAL EDUCATION: A LOOK FROM BOTH ENDS OF THE TUNNEL

The purpose of this paper is twofold. The first is to describe a method of multiple-entry/multiple-participant-observer methodology that seems to uniquely portray some of the present methodological debates within anthropology. The second objective is to describe a rural school district as it attempts to survive a major state reform.

The Method

McCall and Simons (1968) describe a multiple-entry method of participant-observation particularly suitable for studying modern complex organizations. In such complex organizations there is a hierarchy with sufficient structure to obscure even a reasonable view of the organization from any single organizational vantage point. This is not due simply to the number of organizational eschelons but also to the "separateness" and, perhaps, "secretiveness" of the various decision-making subsystems within the organization.

"No one knows the trouble I see" or "what goes on behind closed doors" in the board room. Even on public boards, like school boards, where sunshine laws prohibit secretiveness, a considerable amount of "contrivance" goes on in order to "negotiate" the decision which will be ritualistically and publicly enacted later at the public board meeting. Some of this negotiation takes place among central office staff and the superintendent; some involves school board cliques and perhaps the superintendent. In any case, the total decision-making function of a school board can certainly not be seen from public positions outside the board itself. (For example, see Iannaccone and Lutz, 1969).

The same can be said for operations within central office departments of large local school districts. This happens as well within individual schools, or even separate teacher cliques within a school or classrooms in a school. All that happens within an organization cannot be observed or understood from a single vantage point or viewpoint.

This inability to know or control a complex organization is one of the realities which produced the concept of loose coupling. Loose coupling may be, to some extent, making a virtue out of a reality. Various subsystems of an organization will occasionally operate in rather independent fashions and will tend to protect their ability to operate independently by keeping certain information from other subsystems. Top management seems either helpless or unwilling to change that situation. Such an organization is labeled a loosely coupled organization and declared a virtue and a prerequisite of creative management. The real virtue is recognizing that reality.

This is not an attack on loose coupling, a concept which does describe most modern complex organizations and, particularly, educational organizations. It is a statement about complex organizations which seems to require a multiple-entry technique if we are to be able to produce adequate ethnographies of such organizations. If an organization is loosely coupled, if things go on at one level to which other levels are not privy, then observations must be made from several levels in order to reasonably describe the organizational process.

A second methodological matter is also at issue. Today debates rage regarding traditional or classical anthropology as exemplified by Malinowski, Radcliff-Brown or Mead, for example, and interpretive anthropology as lead by Geertz (1973) and exemplified by Marcus and Fischer (1986). The controversy between traditionalists and experimentalists in anthropology seems to center on the extent to which the anthropologist/observer uses his/her conceptual focus (assumed to be bias free) to frame the description of the culture being observed or the extent to which the description uses the native view (or interpretation) of the culture, and finally, which of these is the real and correct description.

Marcus and Fischer (1986, p. x), speaking of the "new" ethnography, say, "the period of experimentation is characterized by eclecticism, the play of ideas free of authoritative paradigms . . . and openness to diverse influences embracing whatever seems to work in practice. . . ." Where once a major caution to every novice ethnographer was to avoid "going native," new anthropology is at least as likely to require that one can see the native point of view in the ethnography. The debate between emic and edic research rages with a new vocabulary and a new enthusiasm.

Perhaps, however, there are several realities in a single story. Perhaps not only the position of the participant-observer in the organization but also the point of view of a good, but different, ethnographer changes the ethnography. Maybe neither traditional nor experimental ethnography is bad ethnography. Given both descriptions, the "truth" may be in the conceptual merging of these different, yet

each correct, descriptions of the organization or culture. Such a process may be similar to merging the empirical and representational models into the explanatory model discussed by Caws (1974).

This multiple-entry into a single organization of two trained observers, each with a somewhat different organizational and theoretical perspective, is somewhat unique and one concern in this paper. Such a method of participant-observation was used in this study. Louis M. Smith has used something like this method when he and Jeffery studied The Complexities of an Urban Classroom (1968) and when he and Keith studied the Anatomy of an Innovation (1971). But in those cases no effort seems to have been made to exact different views of the organization, and both observers were generally at the same level. Lutz and Lutz (1981a) and (1981b) used the multiple-entry/multiple-observer technique, but again no effort was made to exact different views of the organizational/cultural process. In fact, discussions between the researchers of early data and the later observations which followed always led to similar views not only about the empirical observations but their meaning as well. The data seemed to fit and, where it did not, there was agreement about the conditions and their interpretation. No such agreement emerged in this study. While there was no disagreement about the empirical "reality" being observed, in most cases the "interpretations" of each researcher were at opposite ends of the continuum.

In this study, as in earlier studies done by these researchers, the one entered at some administrative eschelon (with an administrative set of concepts and ideas) and the other entered at the teacher level (with

commensurate concepts and ideas). In these earlier studies, either or both of the observers were full participants "owning" the participant roles from which they observed. In this instance, the teacher-observer role was the full-total participant. The administrative entry was through the use of administrative interns in the school, lending an observer's role through the supervision of them on site and the review of their logs and comments. In addition frequent visits and observations were possible as the graduate advisor of the principal of the school and as frequent visitor to the school in that role and as spouse of the teacher. Because of these relationships, the entry at the administrative level had not only observational entry to the school but the opportunity to have frequent and extended discussions with both the principal and the superintendent both of whom were housed in the same K-12 building.

While this general method of team multiple-entry and observation is not totally unique, as noted above, it is surely not the usual participant-observer/ethnographic method. Little has been done to describe such a role or the role of the full participant as observer (i.e., using an "owned" role in the organization or culture). In our view, not only has such a full participant role been undervalued by ethnographers, but it has been unfairly maligned. Of some importance, it would appear to meet the criteria touted by the new wave of "experimental ethnography." It is the purpose of this paper to describe and suggest that there are certain advantages to this multiple-level/multiple-value-set methodology.

The Description

The second purpose of this study is to provide a description of a rural school district attempting to survive a major state education reform. Observations were made for a period of two school years, 1983-84 and 1984-85, in a small, rural, K-12, single campus school district. The school district, called Dairyland, was composed of what had been 8 smaller 2-4 room schools each operating under separate school boards. Merging in 1942, Dairyland operated a segregated Black school until 1966. Housing 230 K-12 pupils in 1986, they project a 104% growth totalling 470 pupils by 1996.

Dairyland is one of 432 school districts in Texas classified by the state as "rural." These districts represent 40.6 % of the total school districts in Texas but house only 6.5 % of the public school pupils in Texas. These districts are not all exactly alike, but they all clearly share certain cultural characteristics. Peskin (1978), Loomis (1950, 1960), Nachtigal (1982), and Nash (1980) all provide evidence of common cultural characteristics in rural American schools. Therefore, the carefully documented response of a rural school to the state reforms should be of educational and cultural significance.

In 1982, the Texas legislature passed H.B. 246 mandating a revised state-wide curriculum in all grades and all subjects. These contained "essential elements" that are required to be taught by every teacher and evidence of that teaching must be recorded in some satisfactory fashion. Additionally, in 1983, H.B. 72 was passed by the legislature enacting a major reform including a "no pass/no play" rule, a longer school year, and mandated testing of both pupils and teachers. This reform was

oriented to urban and high tech interests to meet the "necessities of economic transition" (Plank, 1986, p. 13). Without belaboring the point, it is safe to say that the Texas reform, like every present state reform, was calculated to change public education in ways making it more Gesellschaft and less Gemeinschaft, more urban-like and less rural-like.

In the fall of 1983, just after the 1982 reform act, Dairyland hired Mrs. Lincoln, a newcomer to Texas who had lived all her life in the North. Her values were more urban-like, having grown up in a major city and lived in New York City for four and one-half years. The major 1983 reform was enacted during her first year teaching in Dairyland.

Dairyland was Gemeinschaft-like. On the seven-person school board, all but one member had some relative who had previously served on that school board. Two were "third generation" board members. Of the 22 faculty, five lived in Dairyland's boundaries (no other active, certified teacher was known to live within the boundaries), four lived in neighboring rural areas, and nine more lived in a neighboring small city. The four others lived within 40 miles of the school, none in a large city. Of 13 non-professional staff (part or full-time), all but four lived within Dairyland's boundaries. Dairyland itself had no town, no major industry, and no business employing more than four persons (except in agriculture). The map, Figure 1, indicates the "ruralness" of Dairyland.

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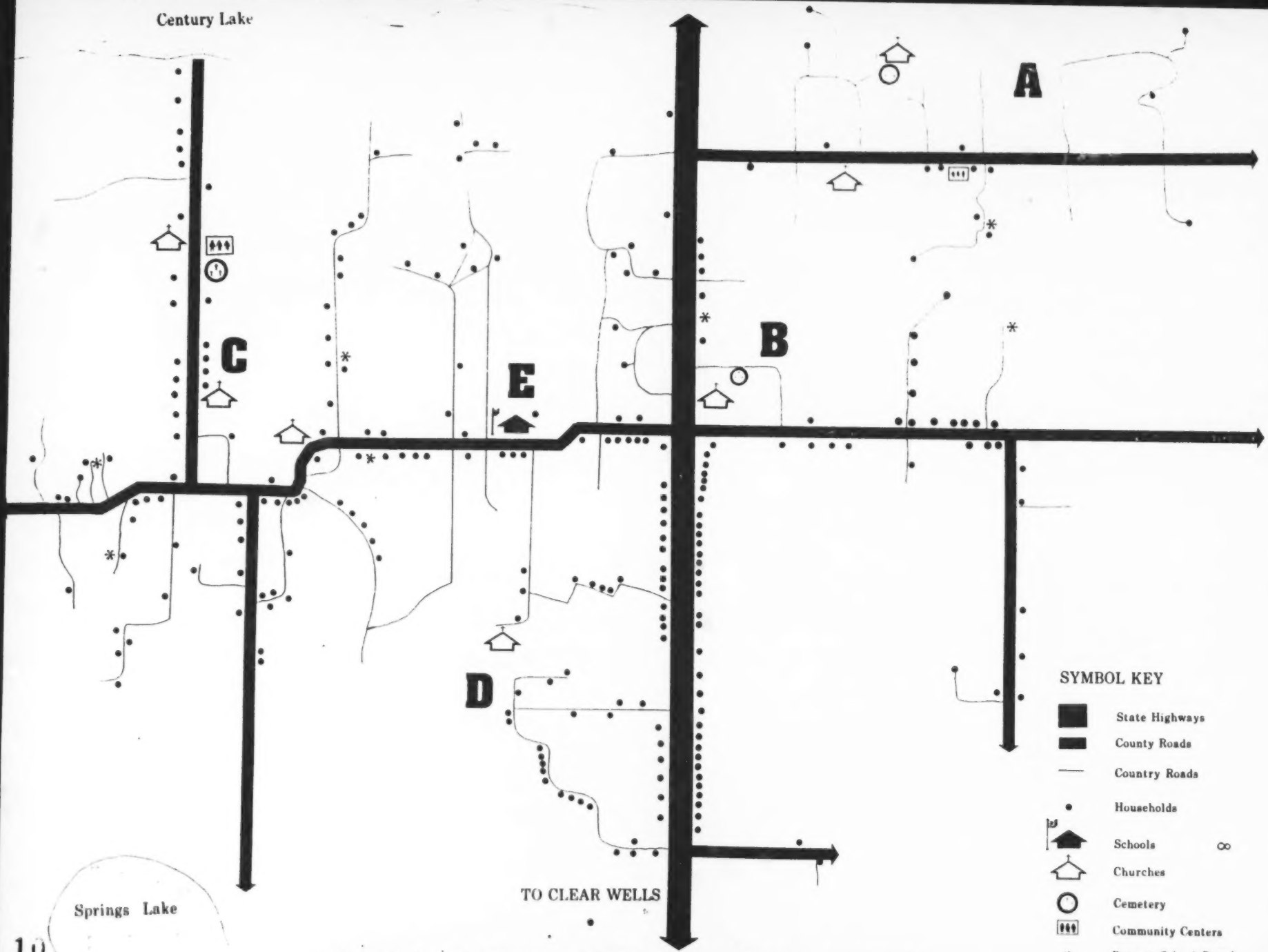

FIGURE 1 MAP OF RURAL ISD SCHOOL DISTRICT

The new (K-12) Dairyland school building was only 6 months old in 1983. On the same site was the old wooden gymnasium, an old metal agriculture building that was replaced with a new brick Ag. building in 1986, and an old building that was rebuilt (in 1986) as two primary classrooms in order to meet reform mandates. An old wooden house on the same site was the renovated residence provided for the superintendent.

Before getting her position in Dairyland, Mrs. Lincoln was asked to interview with the school board. She drove 40 miles from the Metroplex to the Dairyland exit. There she ate dinner at a truck stop where the waitress asked, "Are you the new science teacher-lady?" Her eastern accent and the town gossip had caught up with her. She was already known to the community even before she accepted the position. She met with the board, got the job, and began teaching in Dairyland on August 17. Within a week she was dubbed the "Resident Yankee" by her colleagues. The differences were clear but without any observable hostility. In fact, there appeared to be considerable good humor about the "kidding" on both parts, hers and the rest of the Dairyland faculty.

Mrs. Lincoln taught 4th, 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, and 10th grades science classes; six straight periods a day with a 10-minute morning break and a 20-minute lunch break. The following year, she taught basically the same schedule except 6th grade science was replaced with a 6th grade gifted class, an 11th grade chemistry instead of the 4th grade science, and the 10th grade biology was split into two groups (pre-biology and biology both taught during the same single period in the same room). The first period of the seven-period day was a

preparation period for all teachers making a 7:45 a.m. to 3:45 p.m. school day.

Teaching School in Dairyland - Pre-H.B. 72

Of course, Mrs. Lincoln saw the school and the science laboratory during her visit to the school for her interview. It was new and modern. She had been told that the previous science teacher, who had been fired, had not used the lab sufficiently during the half year it had been open and that they (the board) hoped Mrs. Lincoln would make maximum use of it. What she and, apparently, the board did not know was that there was no gas to the gas outlets in the science lab (and no way to get it there) and there were not even the most basic lab materials with which to work.

As the semester continued, several thousand dollars worth of materials were purchased at Mrs. Lincoln's request. To the credit of the board, they never refused a request for science materials once the superintendent could be convinced the materials were needed. As a former science teacher, he would always respond initially, "I never needed that to teach science. Do you know how much that will cost?" However, the superintendent would usually recommend it to the ard.

The First Teaching Days

The thing that seemed most startling during the first days and weeks can be categorized in three related ways: (1) the students' general knowledge was generally much lower than Mrs. Lincoln had been used to; (2) the math and English skills needed to do science were generally at a very low level (sometimes several grades below their grade level); and (3) most of the students, parents, and even the

teachers and administrators felt that the above situation was quite alright. The people in the community felt that most students really could not use, and, therefore, should not be expected to learn, basic science knowledge and concepts. A common response from pupils to a request to some homework assignment was, "My mother said I shouldn't have to learn this stuff. It won't help milk cows."

Rural people, as do many inner city residents, not only have their own culture but to some extent they have a unique dialect. For at least 20 years, there has been a debate about "non-standard" English, its acceptability, and its use (for example, see Grill & Bartel, 1977; McCarthey, 1977). Dairyland was no exception. The vast majority of students, parents, and even school board members, teachers, and school administrators spoke non-standard English to some degree. The tense of the verb used was often incorrect. Double negatives were more the rule than the exception. The principal consistently wrote as he spoke, "we or (instead of are) going. . ." in communications to teachers. Whether one personally takes an accepting attitude toward non-standard English or not, the standardized state-mandated tests (used in the state reform) are non-forgiving.

Students were used to true and false tests and simply could not respond to questions requiring two or three sentence answers. They would often leave the question blank. When they answered, it would be with incomplete sentences, poor grammar and spelling, and often with a totally wrong answer. One extreme example was a pupil in 8th grade who could neither spell nor construct a sentence, printed everything in capital letters, and used no punctuation including the use of spaces

between words. He answered a question about the center of the solar system: "SUNCENTREOFSISTUM." Translation: [The] Sun [is the] center of [the Solar] System.

There was a single, "non-categorical room" for all special education pupils, 1-12. This was called a "resource room." The single teacher and one aide provided no resources for teachers. They had no time to help other teachers with as many as 24 pupils to teach at various levels and with various problems. All special education pupils were "mainstreamed" in science at all grade levels.

Corporal punishment is much in vogue in Texas, especially in rural Texas. Mrs. Lincoln, however, had never used corporal punishment and made it clear she neither intended to use it nor to have disruptive pupils in her class. At first, neither students, other teachers, the principal, nor most parents could understand this. "How else can you keep order?" "Sometimes you've got to get their attention," "A couple of 'licks' can do the trick," were typical comments.

Co-curricular Activities

One of the problems plaguing instruction during the first year of this study was the constant interruption of instructional time for other "school related" activities. Every class and school organization (e.g., Future Farmers of America, the Honor Club, the Cheerleaders) had certain fund-raising activities. These activities included raffles and the sale of items from jackets, to apples, to hams. There was never a day, and sometimes never a period during the day, that was not interrupted either by some student coming into the classroom to sell something or a period

lost to make a banner or a poster for an athletic event, PTA night, Halloween night, Christmas presentation, Education Week, etc., etc.

Because of the nature of the rural consolidated school, most of the pupils rode school busses. Others who drove or rode with students driving (mostly in pick-up trucks) had to leave at the end of school to do farm chores. Therefore, athletic teams practiced only during the 50-minute "athletic perod" which was the 7th period of the day. This greatly limited their ability to practice and, therefore, to excell. It did not limit the interscholastic participation, however. Although the school track team never practiced, the "track team" left school on four occasions to participate in track meets. They never won a meet.

There was minimal practice time for the baseball team as well and barely enough 10th, 11th, and 12th graders to make up a baseball team. One day, an "away" game had been scheduled. The trip required the team to leave at 10:00 a.m., but only 8 boys were in school that morning. The principal "excused" one boy to drive to the house of a team member he knew was cutting school. By 10:00 a.m., the boy had returned with the other boy who was cutting. The team and certain "excused" rooters boarded the bus and left for the day.

Both the boys' and girls' basketball teams did practice. Basketball games were attended by between 75 and 150 people. Although the boys' team seldom won, the girls' team did well in 1983-84 and went to district finals. But, win or lose, games were community events. The snack bar was open and did a lively business. Some grade or club was "allowed" (perhaps in some cases required) to run the snack bar on a rotating basis. The club received 30% of the gross profits and the

"superintendent's fund" received 70%. Profits from the snack bar, that operated each lunch period as well, went to the "superintendent's fund" from which he allocated funds for "things he felt important." It was sometimes difficult to obtain parents to help with the snack bar responsiblities. As often as not these fell to the teacher who was grade or club sponsor.

The major school/community event was "Halloween Night." This event attracted more community participation than any other school event. Each grade ran a "booth" of some kind. There was the basketball throw, the football throw, the cake walk, dart throw, pitch the rings, the jail, the golf putt, etc. Each charged 50 cents or a dollar for one or three tries to win. Prizes, donated by pupils in the room, were generally candy bars or 2-liter bottles of soft drinks. In addition, each booth had something to raffle off. The evening began at 6:00 p.m. and ended about 8:30 p.m. At the end of the evening, there was a "Parade of Goblins" when 35-50 young children marched across the front of the gym. The child with the best costume was given a prize. This event, held in the gymnasium, attracted several hundred community members of every age as well as the entire faculty of Dairyland.

Graduations for both the 8th and the 12th grades ranked second among school/community events. Significant symbols surrounded these events including the backdrop trellis, artificial flowers, the candelabra (borrowed from a funeral home), and last, but not least, the traditional songs sung at the graduation and practiced (during class time) by the classes. Each of these graduations appeared to be important socializing events in the local culture. They had limited

academic significance. They were more a symbol of passage as a birthday or wedding would be.

The Junior-Senior Prom was also a major event each year. Girls spent hundreds of dollars for long formals, and the boys rented tuxedos and most wore a western hat which was never removed. The general purpose room of the school building was decorated by the junior class according to some theme. Besides the junior-senior classes and their guests, faculty and administration attended. A catered dinner was the first order of the event. This was followed by a presentation of the traditional class speeches and prophecies. A few of the boys read so badly that their female counterparts stood by their sides and prompted them. The speeches ended with a class prophesy and the dance began to recorded music. Within 45 minutes, the girls had changed their $350 gowns and were in jeans and blouses, and the boys' tuxedos were also replaced with jeans and western shirts. Western hats remained in place on their heads. After an hour and a half, everyone had left to "party" in the community. For many this meant alcohol. For some it meant sex. In 1986, for the first time, the prom was held in rented space in a motel in nearby "Small City." For the first time, the faculty of Dairyland was not invited to the prom. Things were changing in Dairyland.

Homecoming could have been any basketball night at home except the parking lot was more crowded. The usual visiting school busses were on the lot. The usual 3 X 2 table was by the door with the usual cash box manned by one teacher. It cost $2.00 to get in, in cash. There were no tickets issued. Teachers and their spouses got in free.

Upon entering, you could see the banners made in classes that day. Families were there as were recent graduates with dates or perhaps their spouses. Some of the students had dates. Most did not. Many of the girls from 6th to 12th grades had homecoming "mums." These were composed of ribbons with a button center proclaiming "Go Bears." The ribbon streamers of red and white were at least 3 feet long. There were 6 streamers each decorated with "bronzed trinkets" (i.e., basketballs, tennis rackets, footballs, etc.). Worn by the younger, smaller girls, the ribbons nearly touched the ground.

Most of the girls were dressed in party dresses (not formal dresses), wore hose and heels, and had their hair done professionally. Boys dressed in regular jeans, open western shirts, and a western hat which they never removed. Some wore the farmer's tractor cap, also never removed.

The adult males dressed as their younger counterparts and the females in more casual dress than the female students, some in jeans, some in dresses. Younger children ran to and fro with cokes, hot dogs, or nachos. There seemed no shortage of money for the ever-open snack bar. The first game was played by the girls' team. They won due largely to one Hispanic girl who was selected as "All District" in Dairyland's classification and received an athletic "scholarship" to a state college.

Between games, the Homecoming Queen candidates retired to the girls' rest room/dressing room to put on formal dresses. Each of the upper grades had a queen candidate. The principal brought out the portable PA system and set it up. (He had been timer during the game.)

He then introduced the superintendent who was dressed in a navy blue blazer, gray slacks, and white shirt open at the collar with no tie.

The superintendent made a few welcoming remarks. He then introduced each candidate giving her name and the names of her parents and her escort. The escorts wore suits and ties. Some, not all, wore the traditional western hat. When introduced, each girl walked with her escort down the center of the gym where they took their places in the middle of the gym.

After all candidates were introduced, the superintendent asked the principal for the results of the voting completed during that school day. Everyone in grades 9, 10, 11, and 12 had a chance to cast a vote. There had been no formal campaigning although candidates from each grade were previously known. The superintendent announced the winner--the Hispanic basketball star, a senior.

She walked down the center to receive her crown to the cheers of the crowd and retired to her "throne," a chair in the "jump circle" at the center of the basketball court. She sat flanked by her court and the escorts while the crowd cheered. Then she and the court retired, changed to party dresses (the escorts changed to jeans) and returned to watch the boys' game.

The evening ended with the usual loss by the boys' team. But it was close. Everyone would have enjoyed it more if they had won. However, it didn't seem to matter all that much. Dairyland had its homecoming.

A Typical Day Teaching in Dairyland

Half of the students in the first period 10th grade biological science class were 15 minutes late because the country roads were muddy. The busses and several students who drove their trucks got stuck. Just after they all arrived, the announcement came over the intercom that all those in the Future Farmers of America should leave class to have their club picture taken. As they returned, it was announced that the homemakers were to leave to have their picture taken. By the time all returned, 35 of the 55-minute period was gone. By the time order was restored, only 15 minutes were left and little could be accomplished. The time was spent teaching about taxonomics.

The second period was 9th grade physical science. Two of the class' major "trouble makers" who had been absent for several days had returned that day. Almost as soon as the lesson started, they began to complain about how hard the work was and that they shouldn't have to learn all of "that stuff." They claimed that the neighboring school districts didn't expect so much. The two were then joined by several others who had been willing to try to learn when the other two had been absent. Order was restored, and the class was told that what other school districts did was of no concern, they were going to complete all of the physical science course prescribed by the state.

During the 10-minute morning break, the discussion in the teachers' room centered on the new state rules about having to pass all of one's classes if one were to be able to participate in co-curricular activities. The principal, superintendent, and the majority of teachers seemed to think the rule was unfair. The superintendent and

principal were the major verbal antagonists about the state intrusion on the way Dairyland ran its school. There was not a single favorable comment about having to pass academic classes in order to play. The rule, it was concluded, would likely ruin basketball in Dairyland and might even prohibit putting 5 players on the floor.

The third period was interrupted by a boy who complained about the work and wouldn't do it. He was sent to the principal who assigned the boy to "in-house detention" for the day. This meant that the boy would spend the day with the second grade, supposedly doing regular assignments but away from his regular classmates. (Usually in such situations little was completed on assignments, but the penalty was more effective than "licks" because the pupils preferred "licks" to being isolated from their classmates. Mrs. Lincoln had talked with this boy's parents several times before. His behavior had improved for a few days but soon returned to unattentiveness and disruptive behavior.)

Lunch period followed. As usual, the school lunch was terrible, and most students ate candy, nachos and cheese, hamburgers, and cokes from the snack bar in the gym. Mrs. Lincoln ate her "sack" lunch while on duty outside. A girl reported that the boys were behind the school chewing tobacco. She checked the story but saw no one. Returning, a third grade pupil reported kissing and necking behind the school. Again, Mrs. Lincoln checked and found no one. Then a fight broke out among fifth grade boys. She broke that up as the bell rang.

During the fourth period, a test was given to the 8th grade life science class. There was some complaining about how hard it was, but

the test went off without major disruption. Mrs. Lincoln told the class how much better they had been doing recently.

The 4th grade class met during 5th period. Just after the class began, the principal came into the room and asked Mrs. Lincoln to step out into the hall. He said the superintendent had been upset about the zero she had given to a school board member's daughter for cheating on a test. The test had been given on a day Mrs. Lincoln had been absent, and the incident was reported by the substitute teacher. The principal's first question was, "How did he find out?" The major problem, the principal said, was that the superintendent felt he should have been informed and that the mother claimed that the substitute had lied, in spite of the fact that the girl admitted having cheated.

Upon returning to the classroom, Mrs. Lincoln intercepted a note written by one of the girls telling one of the boys how much she liked him and hoped he liked her. The note was sent to the principal with the girl. She returned later. The remaining time was spent teaching the prepared lesson.

The final class of the day was 6th grade science. It was a lab class about electric current and circuits in series and parallel. They seemed to show interest, and there were no outside interruptions.

As Mrs. Lincoln prepared to leave school at 3:45 p.m., she picked up a 4th grade book, and another note fell out of the book. This one was from a boy to the principal's daughter, a 4th grader, about how much he liked her. Mrs. Lincoln stopped to see the principal and give him the note, but he had left to change a flat tire on a bus.

Epilogue 1984-85

The road to operational change in local districts through state legislated reform, if sure, will surely be slow and painful. Peshkin (1978) studied a rural Ohio town and found many of the same norms and values there that are evident in Dairyland. The Ohio district's teachers were reconciled to a lax academic environment, "football was king," national pressures were always filtered through rural oriented educators. The school board rejected educators who were too academically oriented. Peshkin concludes, "Given local control, could it be otherwise? And, given the behavior of local students, need it be otherwise?" (p. 198) Both questions are relevant ones to Dairyland.

In answer to Peshkin's local control question, the Dairyland board has made up its mind. It will not be otherwise if they can help it. With the full cooperation and recommendation of their superintendent and principal, they oppose and avoid many of the mandates. The basketball team still leaves school as early as 2:00 p.m., plays a game, stops to have dinner on the way home (paid for from the superintendent's fund), and arrives back as late as 11:00 p.m. They may repeat this several times a week. They play again on the weekend and have scheduled games during six-week testing days requiring the testing schedule to be changed. A notice from the principal informed teachers that they should be aware of the situation and "take it into account."

During the testing week, teachers were informed that the board had elected not to follow the mandate that students could not pass unless they mastered 70% of the mandated "essential elements." Further, in the following year, they were told the emphasis was to be only on the 70%

of the elements required to pass, thus limiting the maximum to the bare minimum requirements. In effect, the board seemed to be saying, "Everyone is to pass and we don't care much about those students with a college orientation who want to learn more!" Actually, the state board changed that mandate in 1986-87 making it more comfortable for districts like Dairyland.

The state reform, however, intended a major emphasis on college preparatory track. The "essential elements" (100% of them) were originally intended as a minimum curriculum, not a maximum. Dairyland clearly did not intend to emphasize high academic standards and values. That is the way it was to be. Given local control and given the behavior of the students and the norms and values of the community, need it be otherwise?

The Interpretation

There is no disagreement between the two major researchers about the foregoing description. Others who "know" Dairyland have read it and agree. "This is Dairyland and it could be other 'rural' districts as well." The data appear to be valid and generalizeable to other rural districts. But what do the data mean? There is a wide difference in the interpretation.

The basic difference in interpretations of the two researchers might best be expressed by one stating, "There are, after all, academic standards. The reform spells them out, teachers need to work at teaching, and students need to work at learning. The state agency should enforce the standards. School districts that don't and won't measure up should be put out of business. The world is changing. Kids

who don't know anything will not survive and, as welfare recipients, will become burdens to the rest of society.

The second interpretation holds that "Societies and individuals should have a choice. Rural America is a culture with different and conflicting values from those of urban America. While most material rewards seem presently to be found in the urban society, that is a matter of valuing also, and, therefore, should be a matter of choice. It is wrong for one culture to force its values and attendant behavior on another culture."

Certainly the foregoing position difference between the researchers is overstated and too dichotomous. Both researchers agreed that teachers must be allowed an atmosphere in which to teach, that students have some responsibility to cooperate in that effort, and that sports and its spectators are not the major reason for the existence of public schools. Both also agreed that individual and community differences shape the schools and a central agency should not be allowed to obliterate those differences and create a monolithic state school system. Yet the interpretive differences expressed clearly existed to some extent and occasionally came into sharp focus during and since the research project.

One researcher would accuse the other of "going native," questioning if kids "shouldn't be expected to learn something!" In return, the other would accuse the first of being an imperialist "British anthropologist" who believed in "government knew best" and had the right to "impose its goals on the natives in the name of the

Empire!" Quite after the fact, we began to believe that this is perhaps what the present argument in anthropology is at least partly about.

Our efforts to publish this study were frustrated by reviewers, some who saw only the structural-functionalist views and rejected that position decrying the "urban-Yankee," who "just did not like southern rural folkways." Another rejection came because of the "improbability of a detached view" because one researcher was actually a teacher in the system and may have "gone native." The fact is that the roles and their attributed viewpoints were actually the reverse of what reviewers perceived. It was the outside researcher who took the "native" point of view and the teacher who believed the district should be required to meet the mandates.

The above specifics are not important except it seems that we were successful in maintaining each point of view both in the ethnography and its interpretation. The problem was that a reviewer, with a point of view, could not seem to tolerate the other perspective or interpretation. The question here, however, is not which reviewer or which researcher was correct. Rather, is it whether the ethnographer's point of view influences the ethnography and its interpretation. Can ethnography be purely description or is description so intertwined with interpretation so as to be inseparable?

The experience of this research leads us to believe the two are inseparable in the eyes of the reader at least. In our own view, we had accomplished an independent description (free of interpretation) and produced a balanced interpretation expressing both points of view. Readers did not agree, however. They consistently saw too much of the

point of view with which they disagreed. That is, they saw interpretation as part of the description. But, which interpretation they saw apparently depended on something they, the reader, brought with them as well as what the researcher brought to the observation.

Rosaldo, Wolf, and Geertz describe the lack of a native point of view in traditional anthropology, and DuBois and Harris accuse the experimentalists as ". . . hostile to applying scientific methods" (Sass, 1986). For ourselves, we cannot reject either point of view. Perhaps for all his structuralist point of view, Levi-Strauss (1966) felt the same way when he said that magic and science were not good and bad ways, but separate ways of knowing. Perhaps that is what Don Juan intended when he said there are "separate realities" (Castaneda, 1971). Finally, that might be the point Caws (1974) was making when he referred to the empirical and representational models merged into an explanatory model.

A Native Interpretation

The Dairyland District had operated for a long time, and it had come a long way. From a group of 2-4 room schools, from a segregated system, from a school house built with the leftover materials from the old schools, and WPA labor—it was now an integrated school with a range of courses including trigonometry, chemistry, and foreign language, housed in a brand new, modern structure. About 20-30% of its graduates went on to post-secondary education of some type. All of its third graders have recently passed the minimum standard state-mandated test. Not all districts, rural, urban, or suburban, can say that.

What if Dairyland isn't the public school equivalent of Harvard; no one in Dairyland wants it to be. They are proud of their school, its basketball team, its former graduates, and (at least publicly) its present students. In Dairyland, families are important. One is born in Dairyland, grows up, and goes to school, usually meets their future spouse in high school, gets married, and raises their family, all within 50 miles of the Dairyland school.

The school supplies an important cultural function in addition to whatever learning takes place. The primary economic base in Dairyland is agriculture and, for all but managers of the larger operations, that does not require a lot of education. In fact, a lot of education sometimes conflicts with the culture and the family values. The more education, the more likely one will leave Dairyland and one's kinship family.

For more than 100 years, people have lived in Dairyland and gone to school there. The Dairyland school has, for the most part, served them very well. To change the school, to make it more urban-like, is to change Dairyland in ways the people of Dairyland choose to avoid. In Dairyland, the people believe that parents have the right to control the education, shaping their children's value systems as they choose. They believe that the state does not have that right unless the people grant it! It is on those grounds, and to that extent, that Dairyland is resisting, and will continue to resist, the mandated reforms. For the traditionalist that opposition is an error, and an interpretation which supports it "has gone native."

The Logical-Positive-Empiricist View

Constitutionally, education in the United States is a state function. Federal courts have held that, while a state function, the separate states must provide equal educational opportunity to every citizen of the state regardless of location, regardless of wealth, and, perhaps, regardless of desire. In an effort to equalize that opportunity across the state, two reform bills were passed by the Texas State Legislature, H.B. 246 in 1982 and H.B. 72. These bills are presently state law and the Texas Education Agency (TEA) is charged with the administrative responsibility of operationalizing and enforcing that code and the regulations passed by the State School Board concerned with that code.

It is obvious from the data that Dairyland is modifying, circumventing, and sometimes in outright defiance of that code. Further, it seems clear that when and where Dairyland has complied, it is because they were prone in that direction before or they felt they would be severely penalized or, perhaps, even consolidated with another district if they had not. Exactly to that extent, and only under those circumstances, will Dairyland comply with the reforms. Given that the state, through the Texas Education Agency, is legally and morally obligated to create an equal educational opportunity for the students of Dairyland and all students in the state, stricter, more rigid and more bureaucratic methods, along with more stringent penalities, may be instigated in order to meet that goal in all 1,063 school districts in the state, including Dairyland.

A second view, that of the logical-positivist teacher, holds that the teacher-expert-professional has not only the right but the responsibility to teach, disseminate knowledge, encourage creativity, and develop high order thinking skills in the pupils. The interference of the cultural norms and folkways, to the extent that they may be an impedement to that process, is a thing to be altered or completely eliminated.

There is the world of "truth" and movement toward that world is to be preferred over the imperfect worlds established through other "ways of knowing." Thus, these two views could be merged into one interpretation of the data and one ethnography "free of the biases" of the native interpretation.

Summary

It is our contention that the issue of interpretation, either the native or the empiricist view, is the yeast fermenting the present debate in anthropology and epistemology. Further, we suggest that it seems presently to be more important and more rewarding to exaggerate and polarize those differences than to find a middle ground which, if not more "truthful," might be at least more huristic. For most of us, the world is not only what we believe it to be. The world continually reminds us of that. Change agents are constantly reminded that their empirical world, often the world of logical positivism, science, and technology, for all its rationality, just does not work. People do not generally think that way nor act that way. Consequently, the world does not operate that way. Take it from an old and scared logical empiricist!

What seems to be needed is a view of society from several differing positions in order to obtain as much of the data as possible. Additionally, at least two interpretations, the native as well as the empirical, are necessary. Either of these alone is a distortion of the operational reality. A final problem exists, however. Given the present stage of the debate, a structural-functionalist, empiricist view will be rejected by the experimental/interpretive school of anthropology. The "native," phenomenological view will be rejected by the traditional or classical school. But both may reject the merged ethnography because it has, in its thick description, some of both realities with which one or the other true believer disagrees. Yet this ethnography may be closer to the "reality" each group is seeking, each in its own "myopic" way. Finally, it may be that ethnography is not only in the eye of the ethnographer, either traditional or experimental, but in the eye of the reader of the ethnography as well.

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